



Henderson County Department of Public Health

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Questions/ Comments about COVID-19

April 16- April 28, 2020

The following is a summary of the COVID-19 Q&A Forum from April 28, 2020, addressing questions and comments received from members of the general public.

County Manager, Steve Wyatt, offered an Introduction:

Next week's session will be part of the regularly scheduled Board of Commissioners (BOC) meeting. Tentatively, special guests will include our state legislators. It will be Livestreamed as usual and posted on YouTube. They'll also offer an update about the BOC Task Force regarding re-opening of businesses.

Today's commissioners included Chairman Grady Hawkins and Mike Edney.

Discussion opened with review of Mr. Hawkins' chart that indicates the case count per day, and slides referencing the suggested Phasing of re-opening as recommended by President Trump and Governor Cooper.

Public Health's answers are in Blue

Emergency Management's answers are in Purple

County Manager's comments in Orange

Some duplicated and lengthy questions and comments are summarized for brevity.

Topic 1: Recovery Rates

How many individuals who tested positive for COVID-19 in Henderson County have recovered?

Of the current cases that are not in the Long-term Care facilities (LTCF's), 15 are reporting as being recovered. The others aren't at a point in time where we'd expect them to be recovered yet. As for the people in the LTCF's, we are working with their administrators to receive updates. Please remember, defining "recovery" for that group will look different than the general population.

Topic 2: Testing

How many tests have been administered in Henderson County?

1,377 yesterday and over 1,400 now. (Mr. Edney pointed out that Buncombe County has twice our population and have done 2200 tests. Mr. Wyatt reminded us that we were the first in the region to do a mass testing back in March to identify if COVID is here.)

When can I be tested? Work with your medical provider as that will be up to them.

Which, if any, segments of the population are receiving routine testing regardless of showing symptoms or not? For instance, caretakers at assisted living facilities, emergency and ICU healthcare workers, or EMTs. How about the Hendersonville Annex USPS mail carriers who interact with large segments of the population daily? Healthcare workers and first responders are screened on a daily basis to make sure they're staying well. If we see one case in a facility, we go in and do broader based testing of the staff. Regarding mail carriers, that's up to USPS. This information may be on their website.

When will antibodies testing be available for those who have been presumed positive but not tested due to lack of testing? Our healthcare partners have identified some that are validated but, much like testing, it'll be driven by healthcare providers.

Topic 3: PPE

Why do grocery stores do not require employees to wear masks? Also, why shoppers are not required to wear them as well? Isn't this endangering the elderly population that resides right here? The Governor has not issued a requirement that people wear masks in public. It is a recommendation but not a requirement. At this time it's up to the businesses to determine requirements. As many employers are implementing it as possible. The medical grade masks need to go to front line folks first. More folks are using cloth face coverings, which offer a limited amount of protection.

We have seat belt, helmet, and dozens of other public safety laws in place, so why not mandated face covers in a pandemic? As part of its reopening actions, will the County ensure an adequate supply of qualified N-95 masks for all of its most-vulnerable population (people over 60 years old, particularly those with underlying conditions)?
This is addressed above.

Will the County require that all citizens wear face masks that significantly inhibit spread of exhaled or expelled droplets that could carry the SARS-CoV-2 virus and hence infect others? Will this be a requirement as the County reduces restrictions and opens businesses and other public spaces? *This is addressed above.* The frontline employees need the N-95's. This is a national capacity issue. We're not unique in this. We have enough for that 30-day supply but we would like more and have them on order.

Topic 4: Long-term Care Facilities

It would be helpful particularly for at risk citizens to know the number or percentage of cases in the community at large, versus assisted living/nursing home cases. This information is on our dashboard. As of today, 80% of our cases are affiliated with LTCF's.

What is being done to curb further deaths and the spread of the virus at Assisted Living and Nursing Home facilities? How are those who are sick being isolated? We started these conversations back in January and increased to regular outreach from the Health Department to the leadership and staff of the facilities and it's now a weekly conference call. We identify and fill gaps in training and resources. Both hospitals provide leadership and guidance as well as innovative treatments for caring for patients. As cases are identified, widespread testing is implemented, and patients and staff are isolated or quarantined as necessary to mitigate the outbreak. We have implemented a strike team (task force), which includes local Geriatricians to assist.

Topic 5: Dashboard

On the dashboard, which is posted as up to date as of 4/24, the total number of positive cases is listed as 158. If, however, the daily cases are added up cumulatively, the total is 126 as of that date. Which figure is correct? I appreciate the attention people are paying to the data. The 126 figure was based on dates of test results. 32 tests were missing their test date, that's why they were not included. This figure has now changed to the date of specimen collection. It should now match with the exception of one that is missing its date of collection.

Assuming that the very high number of COVID-19 cases in ZIP codes 28791 and 28792 are due to Long Term Care Facilities, how many Long-Term Care Facilities do these numbers represent?
There are 4 LTCF's represented with outbreaks (defined as more than 1 case).

Why are you not telling the public/residents of Hendersonville where these last cases are?

The NCDHHS is now offering that detailed information on their website. Previously, we had not disclosed this information due to consultation from the state, but they have since reversed that decision.
We'll add that link to our website.

The four pie charts on “Cases by Race/Ethnicity” and “Cases/Deaths by Gender” all have large “Not reported” fields. Why are these statistics not reported by the sources? Will the County require reporting sources to do so henceforth? These fields were sometimes left blank at testing sites. We will work towards better form completion in the future.

There are some date/timing discrepancies between the case count chart shown during the April 21st update, and the chart on the dashboard. Can you clarify those discrepancies? This is due to the difference between date of testing and date of test results. Please consult the dashboard for a consistent source of information.

I like the dashboard for Henderson County; however, I think it is incorrectly colored for zip code 28758 Mountain Home. I think it is colored with 28732 Fletcher. Can this be checked?

We believe that zip code is specific to the post office at Mountain Home and not geographic.

Can the dashboard include the number of tests conducted as well as the number of positive cases?

This is now on the dashboard. As of this morning, there were more than 1,400.

Are our representatives in the NC legislature able to give the commissioners authority to reopen the county?

We intend to address this at Monday night’s BOC meeting.

Mr. Hawkins: We are looking at what restrictions we can relax locally.

Topic 6: Stay at home order

Any idea of when the county will lift the ban on short-term rentals?

This is also a topic we intend to address at Monday night’s BOC meeting.

Topic 7: Other

Why do some hospital and long-term facilities not have to follow your guidelines you set up for us as residents of Henderson County and Hendersonville? This question is relative to senior shopping hours, directional arrows in aisles and 6 foot distancing in stores. Hospitals and facilities have a different (higher) level of guidance. We encourage everyone to follow space and distancing guidelines.

Why is Buncombe County giving live updates on television and Henderson County is not?

We don’t have a studio like they do but we do have this capacity to livestream and post on YouTube, so we’re working with the facilities we have.

The two pie charts on “Cases by Age Group” and “Deaths by Age Group” clearly illustrate the overwhelming impact of COVID-19 on people over 60 years old. What measures does the County plan to protect this group as COVID-19 restrictions are eased? All these facilities take safety and security very seriously to provide superb care. This pandemic is something new and they’re adjusting as it unfolds. They care deeply about their residents and this pandemic presents challenges. We’ll need to work as a community to support them.

If you are 60 or older and you have high-risk conditions, you should take special precautions- you are in control of what you expose yourself to.

We encourage you all to use your best judgement and wisdom.